

Of Forgiveness of Injuries, and against
Revenge.

A

S E R M O N

PREACH'D before

QUEEN MARY

AT

WHITE-HALL,

March 8. 1683.

MATTH. V. 44.

As I say unto you, Love your Enemies; bless them
that curse you; do good to them that hate you;
pray for them that despitefully use you, and perse-
cute you.

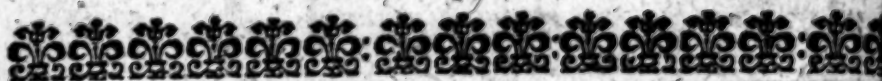
JOHN late Lord Archbishop of Canterbury.

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MATTH. V. 44.

But I say unto you, Love your Enemies; bless them that curse you; do good to them that hate you; pray for them that despitefully use you, and persecute you.

THE Gospel hath promised forgiveness of Sin to us upon two Conditions; That we sincerely repent; That we sincerely repent of the Sin which we have committed against God; and, That we heartily forgive to Men the injuries and offences which they have been guilty of towards us.

I shall at this time, by God's Assistance, treat of the latter of these, from the *Words* which I have recited to you; which are part of our *Saviour's* excellent Sermon upon the Mount. In which he doth not only explain but enlarge and perfect the Moral and Natural Law by adding to it *Precepts* and *Prohibitions* of greater Perfection, than either the Law of *Moses* or the Natural Law in their largest extent, did contain.

He forbids *Polygamy*, and *Divorce* except only in case of Adultery; and likewise *Revenge*; none of which were forbidden either by the Law of Nature, or by the Law which was given by *Moses*.

And to these Prohibitions our Blessed Saviour added several new Precepts of greater perfection than any Law that were extant before. *But I say unto you, Love your enemies.* The Jewish Law commanded them to love their Neighbour, meaning their Brethren and those of their own Nation: But our Saviour, by commanding us to love our Enemies, hath in the most emphatical manner that can be commanded us to love all Men. For if any were to be excluded from our Charity, none like



likely to be so as our Enemies. So that after a command to love our enemies, it was needless to name any others; because Men are naturally apt to love those that love them.

I say unto you, Love your Enemies; here the inward affection is requir'd. *Bless them that Curse you*; here outward Civility and Affability are requir'd, in opposition to rude and uncivil Language; for *so blessing and cursing* in Scripture frequently signifie. *Do good to them that hate you*; here real acts of kindness are commanded to be done by us to our bitterest and most malicious Enemies. *Pray for them that despitefully use you, and persecute you*: These are the highest expressions of Enmity that can be, Calumny and Cruelty; and yet we are commanded to pray for those that touch us in these two tenderest Points of all other, our Reputation and our Life. And to secure the sincerity of our Charity towards our Enemies, we are requir'd to express it by our hearty prayers to God for them: To God, I say, before whom it is both impious and dangerous to dissemble; and from whom we can expect no mercy for our selves, if with feigned Lips we beg it of Him for others.

You see what is the Duty here required; That we have a sincere affection to our most malicious and irreconcilable Enemies, and be ready upon occasion to give publick Testimony of it.

And because this may seem a hard duty, and not so easy to be reconciled either to our Inclination, or our Reason; I shall endeavour to shew, that this Law is not only reasonable, but much more perfect and excellent, and the practice of it more easie and delightful, and upon all accounts much more for our benefit and advantage, than the contrary: And that upon four Considerations; which I shall endeavour to represent with their just advantage, and so as may, I hope, not only convince our Judgments of the reasonableness of this Precept, but likewise bend and sway our Wills to the obedience and practice of it.

I. If we consider the nature of the act here required which is to *Love*; which when it is not a mere Passion but under the government of our Reason, is the most natural, and easie, and delightful of all the Affections which God hath planted in Humane Nature: Whereas *Ill-will*, and *Hatred*, and *Revenge*, are very troublesome and vexatious Passions. Both the devising of mischief and the accomplishment of it, and the reflection upon afterwards, are all uneasie: and the consequences of many times pernicious to our selves. The very desire of Revenge is troublesome, and puts the Spirits into unnatural fermentation and tumult. The Man that meditates it is always restless, his very soul is swelling and boils, is in pain and anguish, hath no ease, no enjoyment of it self so long as this Passion reigns. The execution of it may perhaps be attended with some present pleasure, but that pleasure is unreasonable, brutish, momentary and short, like a flash of Lightning which vanisheth in the twinkling of an Eye.

It is commonly said that Revenge is sweet, but a calm and considerate mind Patience and Forgiveness sweeter, and do afford a much more rational and so and durable pleasure than Revenge. The Monuments of our Mercy and Goodness are a far more pleasing and delightful spectacle than of our Rage and Cruelty. A no sort of thought does usually haunt Men with more terror, than the reflection upon what they have done in way of Revenge.

Besides that the consequences of this Passion do commonly prove very prejudicial to our selves. For Revenge of one injury doth naturally draw on more and will oblige us for the same reason to a new Revenge of them; and this brings on a perpetual and endless circulation of Injuries and Revenges. So that who seeks Revenge upon another doth commonly in the end take it upon himself, and whilst he thinks to transfer the Injury which he hath receiv'd upon him that did it he doubles it upon himself.

Such, and so great are the troubles and inconveniencies of a malicious revengeful temper: but *there is no torment in Love*, as St. John excellently says. To be kindly affection'd towards all, to bear no grudge or will, no thought of displeasure or revenge towards any Man, is the best posture, the most pleasant state of the Mind. So that if not for our sakes, yet for our own, we should *love our Enemies, and do good to them that hate us*; because to be thus affected towards all Men, is as great kindness to our selves as it is charity to others.

I. If we consider the qualification of the Object; it is our Enemy whom we are requir'd to Love. In whom tho' there be something that is justly justful, yet there is something also that is lovely; and if we persist in kindness to him, notwithstanding his Enmity to us, the enmity may wear off, and perhaps at length be chang'd into a sincere and firm Friends

It is true indeed, that with regard to our selves personal enmity towards one of the most inconvenient qualities that a Man can have, but not before the worst in it self. If we could be impartial and lay aside prejudice, we might perhaps discern several very lovely qualities in him who hates us: And Vertue is to be own'd, and prais'd, and lov'd, even in an enemy. And perhaps his enmity towards us is not so great and insupportable a fault, as we apprehend; he is not perhaps our Enemy to that degree, nor so altogether without cause, as we imagine; possibly we have provoked him, or by his own mistake, or through the malicious representation of others, he may be induc'd to think so: And are not we ourselves liable to the like misapprehensions concerning others? of which we are many times afterwards convinc'd and ashamed: and so may he, and his enmity will cease, if we will but have a little patience with him, and be always with in the like case that others would have with us.

At the worst, though never so sore and causeless an Enemy, though ever so bad a Man, yet he is a Man, and as such, hath something in him which the blindest Passion cannot deny to be good and amiable. He hath the same Nature with our selves, which we cannot hate or despise, without hatred and contempt of our selves. Let a Man's faults be what they will, they do not destroy his Nature and make him cease to be a Man.

The two great Foundations of Love are Relation and Likeness. No one, says Tully, is so like, so equal to another, as one Man is to another.

What difference soever there may be between us and another Man, though he be our Enemy, yet he is still like us in the main; and perhaps too like us in that for which we find so much fault with him, and are inclin'd to offer affronts and injuries.

And there is an essential Relation, as well as Likeness, between one Man and another; which nothing can never dissolve, because it is founded on that which no Man can divest him of, in *Humane Nature*. [Dr. Barrow.] It is from being true, which Mr. Hobbs asserts as the fundamental principle of his Politicks, *That Men are naturally in a state of War and*

Enmity with one another; that the contrary Principle, laid down by much deeper and wiser Man, I mean *Aristotle*, is most certainly *That Men are naturally akin and friends to each other*. Some unhappily accidents and occasions may make Men Enemies, but *naturally every one is Friend to another*: and that is the surest and most unalterable Principle of things which is founded in Nature, not that which springs from mischance accidents and occasions. So that whoever is recommended to us by the notion of a *Man*, ought not to be look'd upon by us, and treated as Enemy.

Consider farther, that an Enemy, even whilst he is exercising his enmity towards us, may do us many acts of real advantage; which though they do not proceed from kindness, yet in true are benefits. The malicious Censures of our Enemies, if we make a right use of them, prove of greater advantage to us, than the Civilities of our best Friends. We can easily afford, nay the wisest Men can hardly forbear, to let a Flatterer; to embrace him, and to take him into our bosom; and an open Enemy is a thousand times better and less dangerous than he. It is good for many Men that they have had Enemies, who have many times been to them the happy occasion of reforming those faults, which not an Enemy would have taken the freedom, I had almost said would have had the Friendship, to have told them of.

But what if after all, this Enemy of ours, this hated Man, prove to be one of our best Friends? For so reconciled Enemies usually are. Nothing any thing will reconcile an Enemy, Love and Kindness will. An obliging goodness is apt to conquer even the worst of Men. It is hardly in the nature of Man to withstand the kindness of one whom, by all that we can do, we have not been able to make our Enemy. After a Man hath received the greatest injury to another, not only to find no Revenge following on it, but the first opportunity taken to oblige him, is so very surprising that it can hardly fail to gain upon the worst disposition, and to melt the hardest temper. So that we should love our Enemies, if not for what they are at present, yet for what they may be, and in hope that by this means they may in time become our Friends.

III. If we consider the Excellency and Generosity of the thing itself, *To love our enemies, and to do good to them that us*, is the perfect goodness, and the advancement of it to its highest pitch. It is the excellent and perfect act of the greatest and most perfect of all Graces and Vertues, I mean *Charity*; which by *St. Paul* is call'd *the bond of perfect union*; and by *St. James*, *the perfect and the Royal Law*: because it is in Men with a greatness of Mind fit for Kings and Princes, in whom it is more admirable than a generous Goodness and Clemency, even to great Enemies and Offenders, so far as is consistent with the Publick Good. Love for love is but Justice and Gratitude; Love for no love is favour and kindness; but Love for hatred and enmity is a most Divine Temper, steady and immutable Goodness that is not to be stir'd by provocation and so far from being conquer'd, that it is rather confirm'd by injury.

7 : For if Hatred and Enmity does not extinguish Love, what can it be? This is Goodness indeed; not only without Merit and Obligation, without Invitation or Motive; but against all reasonable Expectation, and in despite of all Temptation and Provocation to the contrary.

So that to return good for evil, and love for hatred, is one of the noblest arguments of a great mind, and of deep wisdom and consideration: For naturally our first inclinations and thoughts towards our Enemies are full of Anger and Revenge; but our second and wiser thoughts will tell us, that Forgiveness is much more generous than Revenge. And a glorious Victory cannot be gain'd over another Man than this, that when the Injury began on his part the Kindness should begin on ours. If the ways were equally in our power, yet it is a much more desirable conquest to *overcome evil with good*, than with evil. By this, we can conquer our Enemy, and may perhaps fail in that; but by the other we certainly conquer our selves, and perhaps our Enemy too; overcoming him in the noblest manner, and walking him gently till he be cool, without force effectually subduing him to be our Friend. This, as Dr. Barrow firily compares it, [Dr. Barrow] is like a great and wise General, by his Skill and Stratagem, by meer dint of Skill and Conduct, by Patience and Delay; without ever striking a stroke, or shedding one drop of blood, to vanquish an Enemy, and to make an end of the War without ever putting it to the hazard of a Battel.

Revenge is blind and rash, and does always proceed from impotency and weakness of Mind. 'Tis Anger that spurs men on to it; and Anger is mainly one of the foolishnest Passions of Humane Nature, and which commonly betrays men to the most imprudent and unreasonable things. So Solomon observes, *He that is hasty of Spirit exaleth folly*, Prov. 14. 29. Again, *Anger resteth in the bosom of Fools*, Eccles. 7. 9. But to be able to bear provocation, is an argument of great Wisdom; and to forget it, of a great Mind: So the same Wise-man tells us, *He that is slow to anger is better than the mighty, and he that ruleth his spirit, is better than he that taketh a City*, Prov. 16. 32. It is a greater thing, in case of great provocation, to calm a Man's own spirit, than to storm and take a strong City.

Whereas the Angry man loseth and lets fall the government of himself, he lays the Reins upon the neck of the *Wild Beast*, his own brutish Appetite and Passion; which hurries him on first to Revenge, and then to repentance for the folly which he hath been guilty of in gratifying so unreasonable a Passion. For it very seldom happens that any man executes the Act of Revenge, but the very next moment after he had done it, he is sorry for it, and wisheth he had not done it: Whereas Patience and Forgiveness do wisely prevent both the mischief to others, and the trouble to selves, which is usually consequent upon Revenge.

V. If we consider the perfection and prevalency of the *Examples* which the *Gospel* proposeth to us, to allure and engage us to the practice of this Virtue. And they are the *Examples* of God himself, and of the *Son of God* in the Nature of Man.

1. The Example of God himself. The Scripture doth frequently before us the goodness of God's common Providence to Sinners, for Pattern. And this is the Argument whereby our Blessed Saviour preaches the Duty in the Text upon us, in the *Verse* immediately after it; *They may be the children of your heavenly Father, who maketh his Sun to shine on the evil and the good, and his Rain to fall on the just and the unjust.* Verse 45. The same Argument *Seneca* also urgeth to the same purpose. *How many* (says he) *are unworthy of the light, and yet the day shines on them?* And speaking of the Gods, *They bestow* (says he) *their benefits upon the unthankful, and are ready to help those who make a bad confession and use of their kindness.* And almost in the very words of our Saviour, *Etiam sceleratis Sol oritur, &c.* The Sun riseth even upon the vile and profligate persons, and the Seas are open to Pirates.

Thus is God affected towards those who are guilty of the greatest provocations towards Him. He bestows upon them the gifts of his common Providence; and not only so, but is ready to forgive innumerable Offences to them for *Christ's* sake. This Pattern the Apostle proposeth to imitation, *Be ye kind, tender-hearted, forbearing one another, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you,* Eph. 4. *Be ye therefore imitators of God as dear children,* chap. 5. 1. This temper and disposition of Mind, is the prime excellency and perfection of the vine Nature; and who would not be ambitious to be like the most perfect and best of Beings? And so our B. Saviour concludes this Argument in the last Verse of this Chapter, *Be ye therefore perfect, as your Father which is in Heaven is perfect,* which St. *Luke* renders, *Be ye therefore merciful as your Father which is in Heaven is merciful.* So that in that very Duty which we think to be so hard and difficult, you see that we have Pattern on it self for our Pattern. And this Example ought to be of so much greater force with us, by how much greater reason there is why we should do thus to one another, than why God should do thus to us. Our offences against God are more and greater, than any Man ever was or can be guilty of towards us: Besides, that there are many Considerations which ought to tie up our hands, and may reasonably restrain us from sinning furiously upon one another, which can have no place at all in God. We may justly fear, that the consequence of our Revenge may return upon our selves, and that it may come to be our own case to stand in need of Mercy and Forgiveness from others. And therefore out of necessity of caution and prudence, we should take heed not to set any bad example to one kind, lest it should recoil upon our selves. We who stand so much in need of Forgiveness our selves, ought in all reason to be very easie to forgive others. But now the Divine Nature is infinitely above any real injury or suffering. God can never stand in need of pity or forgiveness; and by his own meer Goodness, without any interest or design how slow is his anger, and how ready to forgive?

And, which comes yet nearer to us, there is also the Example of the Father of God, our Blessed Saviour, who in our Nature, and in case of the

Injuries and Provocations imaginable, did practise this Vertue to the
 light: And all this for our *sakes*, as well as for our *Example*. So that
 requires nothing of us, but what he himself submitted to with the
 rarest Patience and Constancy of Mind; in our *stead*, and wholly for our
 advantage.

He *render'd good for evil* to all Mankind, and shew'd greater *Love* to us,
 whilst we were enemies to Him, than ever any Man did to his Friend.

He *pray'd* for those *that despitefully used him and persecuted him*. And
 this, not upon cool consideration, after the injury was done, and the pain
 of his Sufferings was over; but whilst the sense and smart of them was up-
 on him, and in the very Agony and Bitterness of Death: In the height of
 his anguish, he pour'd out his Soul an Offering for the Sins of Men, and
 shed Blood a Sacrifice to God, for the expiation of the Guilt of that very Sin
 whereby they shed it; pleading with God, in the behalf of his Murder-
 ers, the only Excuse that was possible to be made for their *Malice*, that
 of their *Ignorance*; and spending his last breath in that most chari-
 table Prayer for them, *Father, forgive them, for they know not what*
they do.

The last Declaration which he made of his mind, was *Love* to his *En-
 emies*; and the last Legacy he bequeathed was an earnest request to God
 for the *Forgiveness* of his *Perssecutors* and *Murderers*.

So that if any *Example* ought to be dear to us, and effectually to engage
 to the imitation of it, this of our *Blessed Saviour* should; since the Inju-
 ry which he suffer'd have saved us from suffering, and the greatest Blessing
 of Happiness that ever befel Mankind is due to this excellent *Example*:
 then with what Confidence, nay with what Conscience, can we pre-
 tend to share in the Benefits of this Example, without imitating the Ver-
 tue of it?

Can we seriously contemplate the excessive Kindness and Charity of the
 Father of God to the sinful Sons of Men, after all our bitterest Enmity to-
 wards him, and most cruel and injurious Usage of him; and all this Cha-
 rity exercis'd towards us, whilst he was under the actual sense and suffer-
 ing of these things: and yet not be provok'd by an Example so admirable
 to himself, and of such mighty advantage to us, *to go and do likewise*?

But notwithstanding the power of these Arguments to persuade to this
 duty, I must not dissemble some Objections which are, I believe, in many
 of our minds against it; and to which for the full clearing of this matter,
 I will be fit to give some satisfaction. And they are these:

That this Precept in the Text does not seem so well to agree with
 the other of our Blessed Saviour's, in another Evangelist, *If thy Bro-
 ther trespass against thee, rebuke him; and if he repent, forgive him*
And if he trespass against thee seven times in a day, and
seven times in a day turn again to thee, saying, I repent, thou shalt
forgive him, Luke xvii. 3, 4. Here our Blessed Saviour seems not
 to require Forgiveness, unless he that hath done the Injury declare
 his Repentance for it: but the Text plainly requires us to forgive
 those

those who are so far from repenting of their Enmity, that they still pursue it, and exercise it upon us. Thus our Lord teacheth us, and thus himself practis'd towards his *Persecutors*.

But this appearance of Contradiction will quickly vanish, if we consider that *Forgiveness* is sometimes taken chiefly for *abstaining from Revenge* and so far we are to forgive our Enemies, even whilst they continue and tho' they do not repent: And not only so, but we are also to pray for them, and to do good offices to them, especially of common Humanity; and this is the meaning of the Precept in the *Text*. But sometimes *Forgiveness* does signify a *perfect Reconciliation* to those that have offended us, so as to take them again into our *Friendship*; which they are by no means fit for, till they have repented of their Enmity, and laid it aside. And this is plainly the meaning of the other *Text*.

2. It is further objected, That this seems to be a very imprudent and of dangerous consequence to our selves; because by bearing one Injury so patiently, and forgiving it so easily, we invite more; and not only tempt our Enemy to go on, but others also by his Example to do the like. Which will make ill-natur'd Men to provoke us on purpose with a cruel design to wrest benefits from us: For what better Trade can a Man do than to gain Benefits in exchange for Injuries?

To this I answer *three* things:

First, It is to be feared that there are but few so very good, as to make this kind return for Injuries: Perhaps, of those that call themselves *Christians*, not one in a hundred. And he is not a cunning Man that will venture to make an Enemy, when there is the odds of a hundred to one against him, that this Enemy of his will take the first opportunity to take his revenge upon him.

Secondly, It is also on the other hand to be hoped, that but very few are so prodigiously bad, as to make so barbarous a return for the unexpected kindness of a generous Enemy. And this is encouragement enough to the practice of this Duty, if there be a probable hope that it will have good effect; and however, if it should fall out otherwise, yet this will not be reason enough to discourage our goodness, especially since the kindness which we do to our Friends is liable almost to an equal Objection; they may prove ungrateful, and become our Enemies: it having been often seen that great Benefits, and such as are beyond requital, instead of making a Man more a Friend have made him an Enemy.

Thirdly, Our *Saviour* never intended by this Precept, that our goodness should be blind and void of all prudence and discretion, but that it should be so managed, as to make our Enemy sensible both of his fault, and of our favour; and so, as to give him as little encouragement as there is reason for it, to hope to find the like favour again upon the provocation. Our *Saviour* commands us to do the thing, but hath left it to our prudence to do it in such a manner as may be most effectual, both to reclaim the Offender, and likewise to secure our selves against future further Injuries.

3. *Lastly*, It is objected, What can we do more to our best Friends, than to love them and bless them, than to do good to them and to pray for them? And are we then to make no difference betwixt our Enemies and our Friends?

Yes surely; and so we may, notwithstanding this Precept: For there are degrees of Love, and there are Benefits of several rates and sizes. Those of the first rate we may with reason bestow upon our Friends, and with those of the second or third rate there is all the reason in the World why our Enemies should be very well contented. Besides that we may abstain from Revenge, and love our Enemy, and wish him and do him good; and yet it will presently be necessary that we should take him into our bosom, and treat and trust him as our intimate and familiar Friend. For every one that is not our Enemy is not fit to be our Friend; much less one that hath injured our Enemy, and perhaps is so still. There must be a great change in a man that hath been our Enemy, and we must have had long experience of him, before it will be fit, if ever it be so, to take him into our Friendship. All that now remains is to make some *Inferences* from the Discourse which I have made upon this Argument, by way of Application. And they shall be these Four:

1. If we think it so very difficult to demean our selves towards our Enemies, as the *Christian Religion* doth plainly require us to do; to forgive them, and love them, and pray for them, and to do good offices to them, then certainly it concerns us in prudence to be very careful how we make Enemies to our selves. One of the first Principles of Human Wisdom, in the conduct of our Lives, I have ever thought to be this, To have a few intimate Friends, and to make no Enemies, if it be possible, to our selves. *Paul* lays a great stress upon this, and presseth it very earnestly. For he had forbidden Revenge, *Recompence to no Man evil for evil, Rom. 12. 17.* As if he were very sensible how hard a matter it is to bring Men to love, he adviseth in the next words, to prevent, if it be possible, the occasions of Revenge, *If it be possible, and as much as lieth in you, live peaceably with all Men, Verse 18.* That is, if we can avoid it, have no enmity with any Man. And that for two weighty Reasons. The first I have already intimated; because it is so very hard to behave our selves towards Enemies as we ought. This we shall find to be a difficult Duty to Flesh and Blood; and it will require great Wisdom, and Contrition, and Humility of Mind, for a Man to bring down his Spirit to the obedience of this Command: For the fewer Enemies we have, the less occasion will there be of contesting this hard Point with our selves. And the other Reason is, I think, yet plainer and more convincing, because if Enemies will come of themselves, and let a Man do what he can, he will have some. Friendship is a thing that needs to be cultivated, if we would have it come to any thing; but Enemies, like ill Weeds, will spring up of themselves without our care and toil. The Enemy, as our Saviour calls the Devil, will sow these Tares in the night, and when we least expect it will scatter the Seeds of Discord and Enmity among Men; and will

will take an advantage either from the Envy, or the Malice, or the stakes of Men, to make them Enemies to one another. Which would make one wonder to see what care and pains some Men will take, to provoke Mankind against them; how they will lay about them, and snatch at opportunities to make themselves Enemies, as if they were afraid to let the happy occasion slip by them: But all this care and fear surely is needless; may safely trust an ill-natur'd World, that we shall have Enemies enough without our doing things on our part to provoke and procure them.

But above all, it concerns every Man in prudence to take great care to make personal Enemies to himself; for these are the forest and the snare of all other, and when there is an opportunity for it, will sit hardest upon us. Injuries done to the Publick are certainly the greatest, and yet they are many times more easily forgiven, than those which are done to particular Persons. For when Revenge is every bodies work, it may prove to be every bodies curse. The general Wrongs which are done to Human Society, do not sensibly touch and sting Men, as personal Injuries and Provocations. *Law* is never angry or in passion, and it is not only a great indecency, but a fault, when the *Judges* of it are so. Heat of Prosecution belongs to particular Persons; and it is *their* memory of Injuries, and desire to Revenge them, and diligence to set on and sharpen the Law, that is chiefly to be dreaded: And if the truth were known, it is much to be fear'd that there are almost as few private as publick *Acts of Oblivion* pass'd in the World, and they commonly pass as slowly, and with as much difficulty, and till the grace and good effect of them is almost quite lost.

II. *Secondly*, If we ought to be thus affected towards our Enemies, we ought our kindness, and the expressions of it, to be to others as to those who never disoblig'd us, nor did us any Injury by word or deed; to those more especially, who stand in a nearer Relation to us; to our near Kindred, and to our spiritual Brethren to whom we are so strongly linked and united by the common Bond of Christianity; and lastly, to our Benefactors, and those who have been before-hand with us in obligation: For these are so many special Ties and Endearments of Men to one another, founded either in *Nature* or *Religion*, or in common *Justice* and *Gratitude*. And therefore between all these and our Enemies we ought to make a wide and sensible difference in our Carriage and Kindness towards them. And if we not do so, we represent our Saviour as an unreasonable Law-giver, and do perversely interpret this Precept of his contrary to the reasonable and equitable meaning of it. For whatever degree of Kindness is required towards our Enemies, it is certain that so much more is due to others, as according to the true proportion of our tie and obligation to them they have deserved at our hands: nothing being more certain than that our Blessed Saviour, the Founder of our Religion, did never intend any Precept of it to cancel any real Obligation of Nature, or Justice, or Gratitude; or to offer Violence in the least to the common Reason of Mankind.

III. *Thirdly*, Hence we learn the excellency and the Reasonableness of the *Christian Religion*, which hath carried our Duty so high in things

directly tend to the Perfection of Human Nature, and to the Peace of Human Society; and, which if all things be rightly consider'd, are most agreeable to the clearest and best Reason of Mankind: So that those things which were heretofore look'd upon, and that only by some few of the wisest, as Heroical instances of Goodness, and above the common rate of Humanity, are now by the *Christian Religion* made the indispensable Duties of Mankind. And the Precepts of no other Religion, that ever yet appeared in the World, have advanced Human Nature so much above it self, as the Precepts of the *Christian Religion* are: for they strictly forbid the doing of Injuries, by way of prevention; and in case they happen, they endeavour to put a present stop to the progress of them, by so severely forbidding the revenging of them.

And yet after all this, it must be acknowledg'd to be a very untoward *Objection* against the Excellency and the Efficacy of the *Christian Religion*, that the Practice of so many Christians is so unequal to the Perfection of the Precepts. For who is there in the Changes and Revolutions of Human Affairs, and when the Wheel of Providence turns them uppermost, lays their Enemies at their Feet, that will give them any Quarter? that does not greedily seize upon the first opportunities of Revenge, like an Eagle, hungry for his Prey, make a sudden stoop upon them with all his force and violence; and when he hath them in his Power, at his Mercy, is not ready to tear them in pieces.

So that after all our Boasts of the Excellency of our Religion, where is the Practice of it? This, I confess, is a terrible *Objection* indeed; and I intreat of you, *my Brethren*, to help me to the best Answer to it: not by any nice *Distinctions* and *Speculations* about it, but by the careful and honest Practice of this Precept of our Religion.

This was the old *Objection* against *Philosophy*, that many that were Philosophers in their Opinions were faulty in their Lives: But yet this was not thought by wise Men to be a good *Objection* against *Philosophy*. And now we will lay more weight upon the *Objections* against Religion, and make them harder than we think it reasonable to do in any other Case, we will acknowledge likewise, that this *Objection* against Religion is of no great weight. Men do not cast off the Art of Physick because many Physicians do not live up to their own Rules, and do not themselves follow those Prescriptions which they think fit to give to others: and there is a plain reason for it, because their swerving from their own Rules doth not necessarily prove that their Rules are not good, but only that their Appetites are too strong; and too hard and headstrong for their Reason. Nothing being more certain than this, That Rules may be very reasonable, and yet they are not followed.

The *fourth* and *last Inference* from this whole Discourse shall be this, that being convinc'd by what hath been said upon this Argument, of the Reasonableness of this Duty, we would resolve upon the Practice of it, when there is occasion offer'd for it in the course of our Lives. I need not to put you in mind, that there is now like to be great occasion for it: I shall only

only say, that whenever there is so, nothing can be tied more firmly upon us than this Duty is.

It hath often been a great Comfort and Confirmation to me, to see the *Humanity of the Protestant Religion*, so plainly discovering it self, on so many occasions, in the practice of the Professors of it. And setting all other advantages which our Religion had been evidently shewn to be above *Papery* in point of Reason and Argument, I cannot for my life think that to be the best Religion which makes the best Men, and from the nature of its Principles is apt to make them so; most kind and merciful, and charitable; and most free from Malice, and Revenge, and Cruelty.

And therefore our Blessed Saviour, who knew what was in Man better than any Man that ever was, knowing our great reluctancy and backwardness to the practice of this Duty, hath urged it upon us by such force and almost violent Arguments, that if we have any tenderness for our souls, we cannot refuse Obedience to it. For he plainly tells us, That no Sacrifice that we can offer will appease God towards us, so long as we are implacable to Men; *Verse 23d of this Chapter, If thou bring thy gift to the Altar, and there rememberest that thy Brother hath ought against thee, leave thy gift before the Altar, and go thy way: first go and be reconciled to thy Brother, and then come and offer thy gift.* To recommend this Duty effectually to us, He gives it a preference to all the positive duties of Religion: *First go and be reconciled to thy Brother, and then come and offer thy gift.* Till this Duty be discharged, God will accept of no Service, no Sacrifice at our hands. And therefore our *Liturgy* doth with great reason declare it to be a necessary Qualification for our Worthy receiving of the Sacrament, that we be in *Love and Charity with our Neighbours*; because this is a *Moral Duty*, and of eternal Obligation, which no positive part of Religion, such as the Sacraments are, can be acceptable to God; especially since in this Blessed Sacrament of Christ's Body and Blood we expect to have the Forgiveness of our Sins ratified and confirmed to us: Which how can we hope for from God, if we ourselves be not ready to forgive one another?

He shall have judgment without mercy, says St. James, who hath not shown mercy. And in that excellent *Form of Prayer* which our Lord himself hath given us, He hath taught us so to ask Forgiveness of God, that we not to expect it from Him, if we do not forgive one another. So that if we do not practice this Duty, as hard as we think it is, every time that we put up this Petition to God, [*Forgive us our Trespases, as we forgive them that Trespase against us;*] we send up a terrible Imprecation against ourselves, and do in effect beg of God not to forgive us. And therefore to imprint this matter the deeper upon our minds, our Blessed Saviour immediately after the recital of this Prayer, had thought fit to add a remarkable enforcement of this Petition, above all the rest; *For if ye forgive men their trespases, your heavenly Father will also forgive you: But if ye forgive not men their trespases, neither will your Father forgive your trespases,* Matth. vi. 14, 15.

and our Saviour hath likewise in his *Gospel* represented to us both the
 enableness of this Duty, and the danger of doing contrary to it, in a
 lively and affecting Parable, deliver'd by him to this purpose: Con-
 cerning a *wicked Servant* (*Mat. 18. 23.*) who, when *his Lord* had but just
 forgiven him a vast Debt of *ten thousand Talents*, took his poor *Fel-
 low-servant by the throat*, and, notwithstanding his humble Submission
 earnest Intreaties to be favourable to him, haled him to Prison for a tri-
 ble Debt of an *hundred Pence*; and the Application which he makes of this
 Parable, at the end of it, is very terrible, and such as ought never to go
 out of our minds; *So likewise, says He, shall my heavenly Father do also
 unto you, if ye do not from your hearts forgive every one his brother his
 offences*, ver. 35. One might be apt to think at first view, that this Parable
 is over-done, and wanted something of a due *Decorum*; it being hard-
 credible, that a Man after he had been so mercifully and generously dealt
 withal, as upon his humble request to have so huge a Debt so freely for-
 given, should whilst the memory of so much Mercy was fresh upon him,
 at the very next moment, handle his *Fellow-servant*, who had made
 the same humble submission and request to him which he had done to his
 Lord, with so much roughness and cruelty, for so inconsiderable a Sum.
 I say, would hardly seem credible, did we not see in experience how
 unreasonable and unmerciful some Men are, and with what confi-
 dence they can ask and expect great mercy from God, when they will shew
 none to Men.

The greatness of the Injuries which are done to us, is the reason com-
 monly pleaded by us why we cannot forgive them. But whoever thou art,
 makest this an Argument why thou canst not forgive thy Brother,
 lay thine hand upon thy heart, and bethink thy self how many more and
 greater Offences thou hast been guilty of against God. Look up to
 that Just and Powerful Being that is above, and consider well, Whether
 thou dost not both expect and stand in need of more Mercy and Favour from
 Him, than thou canst find in thy heart to shew to thine offending Brother.
 We have all certainly great reason to expect that as we use one another,
 so will likewise deal with us. And yet after all this, how little is this
 practis'd among Christians? And how hardly are the best of us
 able to love our Enemies, and to forgive them? And this, notwith-
 standing that all our hopes of Mercy and Forgiveness from God do depend
 on it. How strangely inconsistent is our practice and our hope? And
 how wide a distance is there between our expectations from God, and our
 dealings with Men? How very partial and unequal are we, to hope so easily
 to be forgiven, and yet to be so hard to forgive?
 Should we have God, for Christ's sake, to forgive us those numberless
 monstrous provocations which we have been guilty of against His Di-
 vine Majesty; And shall we not for His sake, for whose sake we our selves
 are forgiven, be willing to forgive one another?

Do we think it hard to be obliged to forgive great Injuries, and often re-
 ceive; and yet *Woe* be to us all, and most miserable shall we be to all Eter-
 nity,

nity, if God do not all this to us, which we think to be so very hard unreasonable for us to do to one another.

I have sometimes wonder'd how it should come to pass, that so many Persons should be so apt to despair of the Mercy and Forgiveness of God to them; especially considering what clear and express Declarations God hath made of his readiness to forgive our greatest Sins and Provocations upon our sincere Repentance: But the wonder will be very much abated when we shall consider with how much difficulty Men are brought to commit great Injuries, and how hardly we are persuaded to refrain from sinning upon those who have given us any considerable provocation. So that when Men look into themselves, and shall carefully observe the motions of their own minds towards those against whom they have been justly exasperated, they will see but too much reason to think that Forgiveness is no such matter.

But our comfort in this case is, That God is not as Man; that *his ways are not as our ways, nor his thoughts as our thoughts; but as the Heavens are high above the Earth, so are his ways above our ways, and his thoughts above our thoughts.*

And the best way to keep our selves from despairing of God's Mercy and Forgiveness to us, is to be easie to grant Forgiveness to others: without this, as God hath reason to deny Forgiveness to us, so we ourselves have all the reason in the World utterly to despair of it.

It would almost transport a *Christian* to read that admirable Passage in the Great Heathen Emperor and Philosopher *M. Aurelius Antoninus* Lib. 7. *Can the Gods, says he, that are Immortal, for the continuance of so many ages, bear without impatience with such and so many Sinners as have ever been; and not only so, but likewise take care of them, and provide for them that they want nothing: And dost thou so grievously complain, as one that can bear with them no longer? Thou that art but for a moment of time; yea, thou that art one of those Sinners thy self.*

I will conclude this whole Discourse with those weighty and pious Sayings of the wise Son of Syrach, *Eccl. xxiii. 1, 2, 3, 4. He that revenges shall find vengeance from the Lord, and he will certainly retain his sin. Forgive thy neighbour that hath hurt thee, so shall thy Sins also be forgiven when thou prayest. One Man beareth hatred against another, and doth not seek pardon of the Lord? He sheweth no mercy to a man like himself, doth he ask forgiveness of his own Sins?*

Enable us, O Lord, by thy Grace, to practise this excellent and difficult Duty of our Religion: And then, *Forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive them that trespass against us: For thy mercies sake, in Jesus Christ, whom with Thee, O Father, and the Holy Ghost, be all Honour and Glory, Adoration and Obedience, both now and ever. Amen.*